



Members of the Connecticut General Assembly,

I am writing today in support of H.B. No. 6659. I am the program coordinator for the Wethersfield Early Childhood Collaborative, but more importantly the father of a 5-year-old daughter. My daughter, Sadie, started kindergarten this past fall.

In the fall of 2021, I found myself in the living room of our OEC Parent Ambassador Maria Vazquez for my job as WECC program coordinator. Maria came to Wethersfield from Peru. Her teenage daughter translated as I spoke English and Maria spoke Spanish. Her son Justino played on the floor with a toy truck as he carefully watched. Maria does not have a driver's license which limited how much they left the house and language remains a barrier when they do leave home.

It felt that day like Maria and Justino were worlds apart from Sadie and I – though we live less than two miles apart.

Last fall, 2022, Maria and I were standing next to each other on the blacktop of Charles Wright Elementary School as Sadie and Justino stood one behind the other in line on their first day of kindergarten. A few days later Justino and Sadie started soccer together – after WECC helped Maria pay for registration with a camp scholarship through Wethersfield Social Services.

The mission of WECC is to ensure all children are connected to community and ready for school. I can't imagine Justino showing up to kindergarten without these connections, or what happens in communities without local early childhood collaboratives.

Please add \$1 million to the Office for Early Childhood budget to continue funding for 24 local early childhood collaboratives that provide essential infrastructure, parent ambassadors, and core staffing for coordination of services at the local level. We ask that this be increased to \$2 million in FY 25 to allow us to expand by creating 24 new collaboratives, especially regional ones in rural parts of the state so that every town benefits from local coordination.

The story of Sadie and Justino shows we are all connected and need to support every child before that first day of school.

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